

PROPERTY PROJECTS & REPAIRS CONNEXIONAL GUIDANCE

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FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT ADVICE FROM THE 13th MAY 2020

Introduction

Government policy is encouraging the construction industry to restart activities, on that basis we are suggesting that it is now acceptable for churches to consider restarting property related projects which involve external trade's people, contractors or professional advisors. As a guide, this relates to the following generic areas of work:

- Repairs – this includes essential and non-essential repairs to existing elements of a property.
- Maintenance – this includes internal and external cyclical or one-off upgrading works.
- Projects – this includes larger construction projects.
- Inspections – this includes Quinquennial & condition inspections, and valuation work.
- Manses – this includes all works associated with maintenance and upkeep.

Government Policy Basis & Timescales for Implementation

*'All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open. Sectors of the economy that are allowed to be open should be open, for example, this includes food production, **construction**, manufacturing, logistics, distribution and scientific research in laboratories. The only exceptions to this are those workplaces such as hospitality and nonessential retail which during this first step the Government is requiring to remain closed.'*

Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy pp. 25 (HM Government 2020)

This policy is part of the government's roadmap to lift restrictions step-by-step, and is part of Step 1 covering the area of Work, which applied from Wednesday 13th May 2020.

Repairs, Maintenance & Property Inspections

These areas of work are more likely to require a greater degree of direct planning and organisation by Managing Trustees, as they may not necessarily have the direct input from a professional advisor or a lead contractor. Examples of such works could include (although this list is not exhaustive):

- Minor repairs by a specialist sub-contractor (e.g. repointing, reglazing or boiler repairs)
- Singular elemental replacement or upgrading by a specialist sub-contractor (e.g. roof renewal)
- Maintenance of internal or external elements (e.g. redecoration or joinery repairs)
- Replacement of internal fixtures and fittings (e.g. carpet or vinyl flooring installation)
- Inspections by a specialist consultant (e.g. Quinquennial site visits, or property valuations)

There are key processes which it is essential that the Managing Trustees follow:

- Initially, Managing Trustees should follow the Connexional guidance for re-opening a property, including any risk assessments, which can be found [here](#). Any re-opening strategy should be undertaken before any attendance on site.
- In parallel with this, liaise with the lead person undertaking the work or inspection before attending site, to -
 - Ensure they have produced a site risk assessment and have shared it with you;

- Ensure they have produced a work plan in accordance with the government guidance;
 - Guidance for working safely in construction at this time can be found here – <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>.
- iii. It is important that Managing Trustees make a contractor aware of any other users of the building who might also be commencing re-occupation of the building e.g. pre-schools, worship spaces, cafes or shops etc.; so that they can consider this in their risk assessment and construction planning.
- iv. In co-ordination with the lead person, Managing Trustees should also produce a church risk assessment for the project; which ensures that Managing Trustees can meet their obligations to the contractor or consultant, its own church members, other project coordinators, other building users, and any insurance implications (please see later section under Methodist Insurance).
- v. Follow the outcomes of the risk assessment and produce a working action plan which outlines what physical changes or provisions the Managing Trustees need to instigate to meet the requirements and obligation to the contractor or consultant under their action plan (see later suggestions).
- vi. It is advisable to review this weekly in co-ordination with your contractor or consultant; or sooner if a particular issue arises during the course of the works or inspection; any changes to the action plan can then be considered to ensure safe working for all.
- vii. Meetings and discussions are important to ensure the work is completed successfully, but the frequency of these and the medium used should be considered carefully. For example:
- Speak via telephone or an online meeting platform where practical;
 - Use still photographs or 'live' recordings and electronic communication if a particular issue needs answers;
 - If a site visit is required then operate a time system so that only essential lead staff are on site and social distancing rules can be accommodated safely;
 - If attending in person, as for normal site attendance under Health and Safety Regulations, ensure suitable [PPE](#) is worn to avoid potential transfer of any infection e.g. masks, protective glasses & gloves.

Larger Property Projects

Larger projects are more likely to have a project design team advising Managing Trustees or a main contractor co-ordinating the various sub-contractors during the works. It is advised though, that many of the processes for small projects will also apply in this case, and which the Managing Trustees need to consider. This will apply whether this is a new project or the recommencement of works temporarily halted previously:

- i. Initially, Managing Trustees should follow the Connexional guidance for re-opening a property, including any risk assessments, which can be found [here](#). Any re-opening strategy should be undertaken before any attendance on site.
- ii. In parallel with this, liaise with the lead consultant, project manager or health and safety advisor before works commence to -
 - Ensure there are comprehensive site risk assessments;
 - Ensure there are revised work plans (Note: this could be part of a Health & Safety Plan for larger projects); and compliance with the government guidance for construction workers found at -<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>

- iii. It is important that Managing Trustees make the lead consultant and lead contractor aware of any other users of the building who might also be commencing re-occupation of the building e.g. pre-schools, worship, cafes or shops etc.; so that they can consider this in their risk assessment and planning.
- iv. In co-ordination with the lead person, Managing Trustees should also produce a church risk assessment for the project; which ensures that Managing Trustees can meet their obligations to the contractor or consultant, its own church members or other project coordinators, and any insurance implications (please see later section under Methodist Insurance).
- v. Follow the outcomes of the risk assessment and produce a working action plan which outlines what physical changes or provisions the Managing Trustees need to instigate to meet the requirements and obligation to the design team/contractor under their action plan (see later suggestions).
- vi. It is advisable to review this weekly in co-ordination with your design team; or sooner if a particular issue arises during the course of the works or inspection; any changes to the action plan can then be considered to ensure safe working for all.
- vii. Meetings and discussions are important to ensure the work is completed successfully, but the frequency of these and the medium used should be considered carefully. For example:
 - Speak via telephone or an online meeting platform where practical;
 - Use still photographs or 'live' recordings and electronic communication if a particular issue needs answers;
 - If a site visit is required then operate a time system so that only essential lead staff are on site and social distancing rules can be accommodated safely;
 - If attending in person, as for normal site attendance under Health and Safety Regulations, ensure suitable [PPE](#) is worn to avoid potential transfer of any infection e.g. masks, protective glasses & gloves.

Manses

During this period, many Managing Trustees are considering repairs and improvements to manses to make them ready for future stationing. This work is considered acceptable to be undertaken as part of general maintenance and repairs. Once again, it is suggested that the guidance for maintenance generally, as outlined above, is followed in these cases. As some of this work may be undertaken whilst occupied, this is also considered acceptable under previous government guidance as works to domestic properties. Government guidance is very clear to occupiers and trade's persons alike when working within an occupied property, and this must be adhered to in these circumstances. This guidance can be found at - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>.

Costs & Programme for Undertaking Works

Managing Trustees need to be aware of the implications on project costs and length of programme if commencing or recommencing building works at this time of changing government policy. Due to social distancing rules and other necessary restrictions on construction sites, it is possible that this will have an implication on the cost of the project/works, or the length of time it will take to complete the works – or both.

It is therefore essential that as part of the initial enquiries stage, Managing Trustees seek confirmation and agreement to project costs and programme length before works commence. This could be undertaken by a lead consultant or project manager on Trustees' behalf, if relevant, depending on the size of the contract.

It is important that this matter is carried out properly, to ensure that any variations are fair and realistic and aligned with original tender prices or quotations. This might lead Managing Trustees to decide on a retendering process or a formal variation so it is important that legal and costing advice is sought at this stage. Any changes will then need to be recorded in the building contract or other legal agreement for the work. There are other considerations with such legal agreements, and these are covered below.

Contracts and Legal Agreements

Managing Trustees need to be aware of the legal implications of commencing or recommencing building works at this time of changing government policy. This is particularly relevant if work has to be suspended in the future if government policy deems this necessary, and the potential impact this has for any building contract or consultant's agreement. TMCP have produced a thorough and practical guide to building contracts during this time, which can be found at -

<https://www.tmcg.org.uk/about/covid19/resources/guidenotes/cv19-and-building-contracts>

Force Majeure & Frustration Contract Clauses

These are two key elements of a building contract or an agreement which may apply if works were temporarily suspended. Once again, we would refer you to TMCP guidance on this matter –

<https://www.tmcg.org.uk/about/covid19/resources/guidenotes/cv19-and-building-contracts>

Insurance

Any insurance implications for buildings and building contracts during this time are being assessed by Methodist Insurance, and the team are in contact with them to co-ordinate this guidance. This will be published by both the Property Support Team and TMCP when it is made available to us.

Property Access & Limitations

As part of the planning for undertaking a building project, safe means of access and egress for workers, church members and third party users (if relevant) is essential. This should be considered in the risk assessments and action plans, but the following general points should be considered:

- Limit the number of key holders to the building or site area to ensure control access.
- Ensure that if a church member is unlocking then they do not fall into 'at risk' categories.
- Limit access to the areas of work only if practical; this will ensure management of any virus transfer but also dust etc. and therefore implications on cleaning regimes.
- Ensure that everyone who accesses the site signs in and co-ordinates with the contractor the number of visits and personnel on site to ensure that social distances can be maintained.
- Work with the contractor to ensure that any access or working area limitations do not compromise fire escape routes or means of escape to external areas.
- Work with the contractor to ensure that any access or building limitations do not compromise security for the site areas or other parts of the building.

Matters to consider in Risk Assessments and Action Plans (based on government guidance)

Travelling to the property and initial access matters:

- Identify where people can travel alone in their own transport (or walk, or cycle if it is safe to do so) when getting to and from the building to maintain social distancing.
- Stagger arrival and departure times so people can keep to the advised safe distance limits by not using entry/exit points at the same time.
- Provide handwashing facilities (running water, soap and paper towels) at entry/exit points. People should be able to wash their hands when they get to the building and leave. If this is not possible, provide hand sanitiser.

Work Area:

- Physically agree working areas to keep people to the advised safe distance limits.
- Mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people keep to advised safe distance limits.
- Provide signage to remind people to keep to advised safe distance limits.
- Avoid people working face-to-face, for example working side-by-side.
- If the building is listed, any changes need to be sensitive and reversible. Please consult the [Conservation Officer](#) about these changes.

Where it is not possible to keep to advised safe distance limits, consider -

- Allowing only one person per work area.
- Reducing the number of people in the work area.
- Assigning and keeping people to shift teams, that is people on the same shift working in the same teams, to limit social interaction.
- Keeping the number of people working less than advised safe distance limits.
- Using screens or working in different rooms to create a physical barrier between people.
- If the building is listed, any changes need to be sensitive and reversible. Please consult the [Conservation Officer](#) about these changes.

Cleaning:

- Decide on how frequently you need to clean the work area, or communal areas.
- Ensure that responsibilities between contractor and church are clear for different areas.
- Identify objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and how frequently to clean them.
- Provide hand sanitiser for people getting in and out of vehicles or handling deliveries, if they are unable to wash their hands.
- If the building is listed, you should review Historic England's [How to Clean Historic Surfaces](#) and speak to the [Conservation Officer](#) before cleaning historic items such as stained glass.

Moving around the building:

- Limit movement within buildings, sites and properties, to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- Limit the number of people who use lifts or stairs.
- Reduce the number of people in high traffic areas including lifts, corridors, turnstiles and walkways.
- Mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people keep to advised safe distance limits.
- Consider introducing temporary pedestrian walkways to allow people to maintain social distancing when moving around; this might include 'one-way' systems through corridors in co-ordination with different points of access and egress

Common areas:

Agree how communal or common areas are used, such as kitchens, toilets, showers, and changing facilities. The following needs to be considered:

- Physically moving tables/chairs so they are at advised safe distance limits.
- Staggering break times so that people are not using spaces at the same time.
- Where this is not possible, creating additional space for people to take their breaks in.
- Marking areas using floor paint or tape to help people keep to advised safe distance limits.
- Using outside areas for breaks if the locations are suitable and it is safe to do so.
- Encouraging workers to stay on-site during working hours.

Where you cannot keep to advised safe distance limits, you need to think about how to keep common areas clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. You should think about:

- How frequently you need to clean the common areas.
- Identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them.
- Setting clear guidance for the use of kitchens, toilets, showers, and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

Good hygiene:

- Ensure that you have handwashing facilities that provide running water, soap and paper towels.
- Provide hand sanitiser in addition to washing facilities.
- Use signs and posters to increase awareness of good handwashing technique.
- Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/sneeze into your arm.
- Provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to washrooms.
- Set clear guidance for the cleaning of toilets, showers and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.
- Set clear guidance on how to handle goods, merchandise and materials and when cleaning procedures need to be followed.

Information and guidance:

- Provide people (including workers and others) with information on procedures, guidance or ways of working that have been introduced.
- Share this information with them before they start work.
- Share this information with others who are not your workers (for example visitors, church members etc.) where required. This could include signs or notices.
- Consider how you will pass information and guidance to people who do not speak English as their first language and others who may struggle with written and verbal communication.
- Holding conversations with any interested parties, listening to and acting on their concerns.

PPE (personal protective equipment):

- It is expected that under normal site health and safety measures, the contractor will ensure that the normal expected levels of PPE is available to church members if visiting the site. Please refer to the government guidance on construction and outdoor work during COVID-19 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work#outdoors-6-1>
- It must be confirmed to everyone by the contractor before work commence though that this can be done safely and without risk of transfer of viruses i.e. that PPE is not reused or can be suitably cleaned between uses.
- If the contractor cannot achieve this, then Managing Trustees have to ensure that individuals are issued with their own PPE which can be brought to site on each visit and then taken home.
- Please refer to separate guidance on PPE which can be found here – <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>.